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STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

DEADLOCK BEFORE MOSCOW

BY

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by

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ABSTRACT

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This Strategy Research Project intents to offer not a new interpretation of the decisive Battle of Moscow during World War Two, but rather a evaluation of German strategies, their success or failure.

Strategy may be defined as conceptual planning tied to options and directed towards success, normally embracing the fields of politics, military activities, economics, and technology. Strategic planning, in essence, offers various possibilities of action based on the concrete evaluation of a given situation, combines calculation with prognosis, and, finally, covers the execution of the plan with a view to achieving the objective.

Hitler's decision of 21 August to invest Leningrad and to destroy the bulk of the Soviet Armies in the South has generally been attributed to his one sided preoccupation with ideological and economic objectives.

Superficially there was a contradiction between the objectives, on the one hand, of destroying the enemy's living power and, on the other, of capturing his base of raw materials and food supply.

More important, however, is the question, that this Strategic Research Project pretends, as to whether the situation in mid-August 1941 was conducive to an immediate offensive against Moscow, or more precisely, whether there was still time to create the conditions for such a decisive attack.

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DEADLOCK BEFORE MOSCOW.

Would it be correct to describe the German defeat before Moscow in 1941 and the simultaneous entry into the war by the United States as the *ultimate turn*? This at least was the opinion of the Chief of Operations of the High Command of the Wehrmacht (OKW), Colonel General Alfred Jodl, who dictated on May 1945, shortly after the end of the war that "all of us, and specially every soldier, entered this war against Russia with a feeling of foreboding when considering its outcome. It was made particularly clear to me in the catastrophe of the winter of 1941-42, that from this culminating point at the beginning of 1942 victory could no longer be won."

These, and similar questions, still confront the observer more than 55 years after the end of the most violent and bloody struggle in the history of the war, and still await an answer. Since the political and military course of the war has been so abundantly researched and discussed that even the experts find it difficult to keep abreast, it might seem somewhat audacious to add yet another research to this wealth of literature. Yet, in the author's opinion, there is one aspect that has not yet been given due attention: the attempt to determine which military decisions, within the framework of the current political-strategic situation, contributed primarily to a turn in the course of the war, and to consider the consequences of such decisions.

PREPARATION FOR WAR.

On 29 and 31 July, 1940, the OKW staff planners, Jodl and the Deputy Chief of the Operations Staff, Colonel Walter Warlimont, were told by Hitler that the attack was to be made ready for "spring of 1941," specifically, May. Accordingly, on 9 August, the OKW issued the preliminary detailed order, Aufbau Ost, that began Wehrmacht's shift toward Russia. As Warlimont later recalled, Aufbau Ost was "entirely camouflaged, not mentioning the USSR nor the eventual attack." Preliminary planning by the High Command of the Army (OKH) culminated in November-December in a wargame directed by then Quartermaster of the Army Lieutenant-General Friedrich Von Paulus.

While the repeatedly quoted statement by Hitler, that in the course of this conflict Russia had to be "eliminated" in the spring of 1941, does indicate the beginning of a confrontation with the Soviet Union, it would be highly audacious to portray this as an "unalterable" decision.⁷ The relatively long time until 18 December 1940, when the basic Directive No. 21⁸ on the preparation of the attack was issued (Case Barbarossa), and diplomatic steps that were still

taken in the interim, in particular the visit to Berlin by Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov in November, both support the theory that Hitler's final decision must have been reached at a much later stage. Even that vital Directive does not convey an irrevocable decision. On the contrary, Paragraph IV notes that "all steps taken by Commanders-in-Chief on the basis of this Directive must phrased on the unambiguous assumption that they are *precautionary measures* undertaken in case Russia should alter its present attitude towards us."

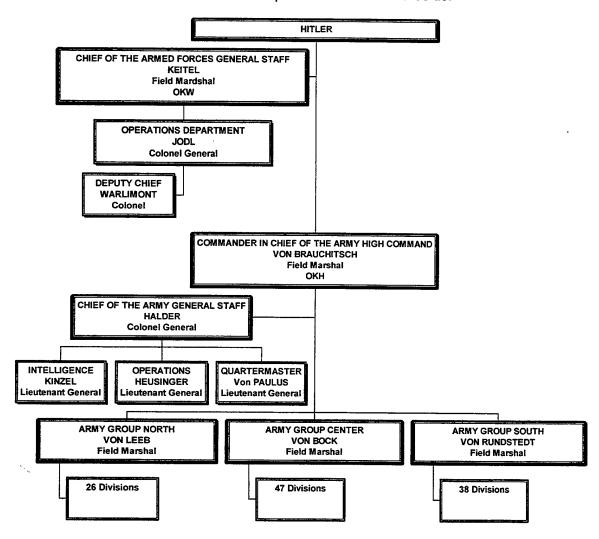


FIGURE 1: GERMAN ARMY CHAIN OF COMMAND AS AT JUNE 22 1941. 10

From the German viewpoint, Stalin was in the far more favorable position. Because of the German-Soviet Pact of 23 August 1939 and the Japanese-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of April 1941, he had a firm foothold in Eastern-Central Europe, was not entangled in any armed conflicts, could develop his military and armaments potential without interference, was being courted openly and indirectly by important powers, and enjoyed something which gave him a far

reaching advantage over Germany: he had time. He could capitalize on the fact that in the spring of 1941 the Wehrmacht continued to be tied down in France, Norway and in the Mediterranean, and thus had a free hand politically, forcing Germany either to surrender peacefully or risk military collapse.

Such considerations by Stalin and Molotov were much applauded by the Soviet military leaders who wanted to conduct a predictable military conflict offensively; in other words on enemy territory. They drew on offensive plans which had already been made in 1938 and were mainly based on the considerations which Marshal Tukhachevsky had given to offensive procedures. What is apparent is the intention to wage aggressive war, which can hardly be explained, therefore, in terms of the incipient deterioration of Soviet-German relations in the summer of 1940.

However, the assumption that Stalin did not approve the "Zhukov-Timoshenko Plan" of May 1941 but only the preparations for defense may safely be discarded. From end of December 1940 Stalin knew about Directive No. 21 through an act of treason and from June 1940 received a total of 84 warnings of a German attack.¹⁶

DEPLOYMENT.

For the attack, OKW had ordered that "the bulk of the Russian Army stationed in Western Russia will be destroyed by daring operations led by deeply penetrating armored spearheads. Russian forces still capable of giving battle will be prevented from withdrawing into the depths of Russia."

After June 22, it was soon to become apparent that while the distribution and concentration of Soviet forces, ¹⁸ up to a depth of about 300 km, had been more or less realistically assessed, the number of tanks, artillery, aircraft and other heavy equipment had been greatly underestimated. According to current knowledge, the actual deployment on either side was as follows in Figures 2 and 3.¹⁹

On the front between the Baltic and the Black Seas, the Wehrmacht deployed 148 divisions; 3,580 tanks including 250 self-propelled guns; 7,146 guns, and barely 2,100 aircraft. It is noteworthy that compared to the size of the territory in question, the OKH only disposed of a modest reserve of 28 divisions, and that these formations were only thrown into the battle many weeks after the beginning of the war.

Based on contemporary knowledge, the picture on the Soviet side was as follows: the four, later five, Western Military Districts²⁰ disposed of 170 divisions,²¹ whereas a further 80

divisions were in process of deployment or mobilization. ²² The total number of tanks was 23,200, of which 15,000 were combat ready. There were 34,700 guns and mortars; over 20,000 aircraft, including 9,100 aircraft available in European Russia, of which 13,300 were operational. ²³

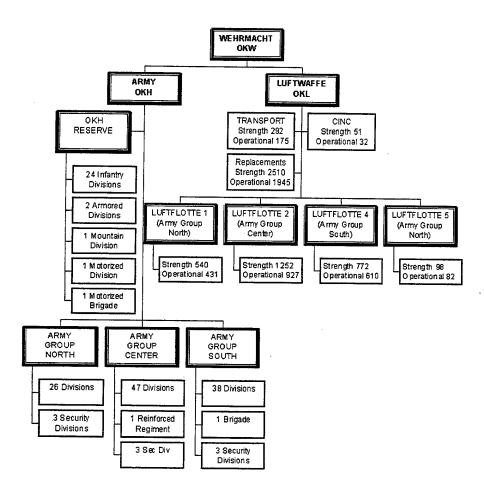


FIGURE 2: GERMAN STRENGTH AS AT 22 JUNE 1941.

In any event, in the Western Military Districts there were at least 198 divisions actually present or available at short notice, ²⁴ against which the assault of the initial 120 German divisions was directed. Even taking into account the normally greater combat power in a German division, ²⁵ the fact remains that there was a numerical equality, whereas in weapons and equipment there was a decided superiority on the Soviet side. ²⁶

Nevertheless, serious German deficiencies in the assessment of the Soviet situation lay in the fact, for example, that the forces beyond the depth of 300 km had hardly been reconnoitered at all, that there was hardly any information on the restructuring into armored divisions and

corps,²⁷ that not all of the armored corps deployed close to the front²⁸ had been identified, and that strategic reserves and armaments capacity had generally been underestimated. It was only in August that the Chief of the German Army General Staff, Colonel General Franz Halder admitted²⁹ that Russia had been greatly underestimated, having already had to note down 360 identified major formations instead of the 200 originally assumed.³⁰

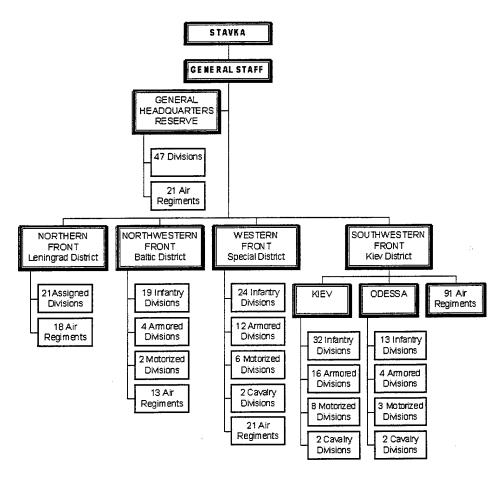


FIGURE 3: SOVIET STRENGTH AS AT 22 JUNE 1941.

OPERATIONS MARITA AND MERCURY.

The delays caused by bringing back the formations employed in the Balkans and Crete were, in fact, not serious enough to prevent the deployment of the German armies being more or less completed by 10 June 1941. Nevertheless, the fact that not all of the forces consigned for deployment in Romania were able to arrive in time created an awkward handicap for the plan. In the end, the OKH had to cancel the deployment of an armored corps in Romania, but

although the attack in the sector of Army Group (AG) South was thereby "diluted," this was not in any way decisive for the outcome of the campaign.

What mitigated against a theoretical invasion date at the end of May or in early June was the fact that many rivers in Western Russia which would have to be crossed in the course of the attack, including the Bug and the Narev, were still in flood until well into June and would therefore have presented a very important obstruction.³¹ For this reason alone, an attack after 10 June appeared to be the only realistic possibility.

FOLLOWING ARMY GROUP CENTER.

In looking at the maps of the areas that became the theater of operations once the war started, there were several obvious and compelling conclusions that could be drawn. For instance, the map that follows³² shows that a natural funnel exists on the route to Moscow from the West.

An invading army would certainly have to pass North of the impenetrable Pripet Marshes. Taking that as a given, the map shows that the route to Moscow compels an invader to cross the so-called "land bridge" formed by the uplands between the Western Dvina River, which flows North into the Baltic Sea, and the upper Dnieper River, which flows South into the Black Sea. It was the control of this critical territory, in reality the only approach to Moscow from the West, that would determine the outcome of the war.³³ This obvious geographical feature was not a secret; rather, it was well known to Napoleon's generals. The following is a quote from an U.S. Military Academy publication:

The Smolensk-Moscow Upland played a key role during Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812 as the upland's East-West, high ground approach made it a logical choice for Napoleon's axis of advance upon Moscow. However, the hilly nature of the upland was also ideally suited to the delaying tactics adopted by the Russian Army.³⁴

It should be noted here that although several German studies prior to Barbarossa featured the land bridge as an important area to control, none of them dwelled on the criticality of it.

Although the land bridge dominated the Timoshenko-Zhukov February 1941 wargame, it was treated by the Germans almost as a passing thought as they believed that the surprise of the invasion and the swiftness of the advancing panzers would prevent the Soviets from

assembling the necessary reserves around the land bridge to offer any effective resistance so deep in the interior of the country.

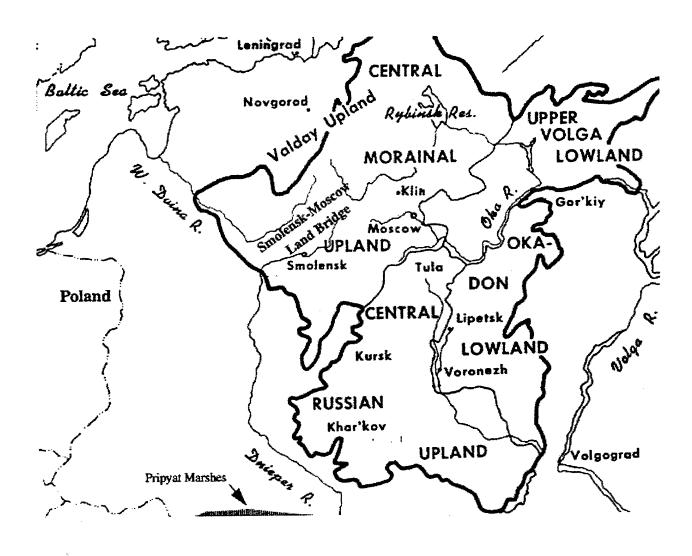


FIGURE 4: THE LAND BRIDGE.³⁶

The first objective set by OKH, within the general framework of its assigned task, was to break through the Russian Front in the West by swift and deep drives with its mobile units, both North and South of the Pripet Marshes, and then to exploit the breakthrough to destroy the enemy forces thus separated from each other.³⁷

The reports about the absence of a Russian retreat from the Bialystok salient were rationalized by Halder as being due to the clumsiness of the Russian command, which he considered to be incapable of taking countermeasures at operational level.³⁸ He thought the

Russians would have to defend themselves in their current positions, being unable to react properly, because "the impact of the shock is such that the Russian High Command could not be expected in the first days to form a clear enough picture of the situation to make so far-reaching a decision."³⁹

The fact, however, that the number of Russian prisoners brought in during the first day's actions was considerably smaller than had been anticipated, along with the noticeable lack of artillery in the Soviets units, did cause Halder some concern. These unpleasant developments force him to conclude that large portions of the Russians forces were located farther East than had at first been thought, but he believed that the bulk of these forces were no more distant than Minsk.

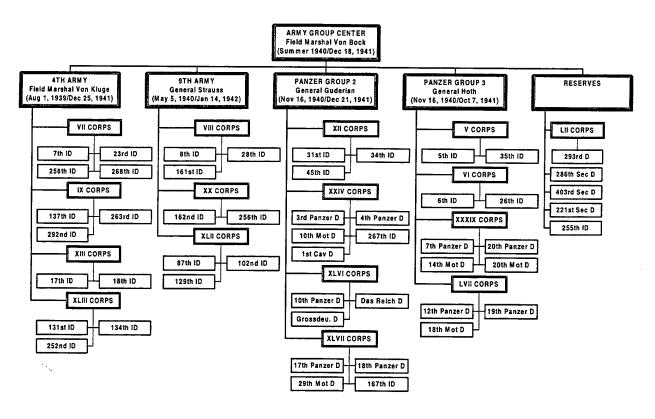


FIGURE 5: ARMY GROUP CENTER STRUCTURE AS AT 22 JUNE 1941. 42

Nevertheless, encouraged by the success of frontier battles, the three AGs all reached their first operational objectives, the Dnieper-Dvina line, by the middle of July, and here and there even went beyond them. While the two outer AGs were pushing the enemy back frontally, AG Center inflicted great damage on the Russian forces in a series of encirclement battles. However, successful as they were, these operations did not break the resistance of the enemy.

It was seen quite early on that the Russian commanders were able to throw new forces into the battle, and that "the giant with feet of clay" was not going to be destroyed as easily as had been thought.

ALL IN AUGUST'S DAYS.

German armies had outrun their logistic trains by mid-July, as Paulus pointed out it would happen in the summary of the wargame. He showed convincingly that the army would overreach its logistics by the time it reached the Dnieper. For instance, the total transport capacity of AG Center on July 15 was approximately 45,450 tons, of which approximately one-third was immobile due to poor roads and the wear and tear on equipment. The railroad transported 6,300 tons on 14 trains and, therefore, could not meet the requirements of the Armies. That is why the operational pause of AG Center after the battle of Smolensk was not so much due to increasing resistance by the Soviet forces, as to the need to spend several weeks replenishing, resupplying and reorganizing the formations and bringing them back up to strength. It is therefore a gross distortion of the facts to claim that the Soviet defense East of Smolensk had dealt the Germans a defeat and thereby prevented their immediate further advance on Moscow. 44

Another importance reason for the delaying of the offensive was the situation of the two neighboring AGs, which were still far to the rear. In mid-July, a serious crisis developed on the northern flank of AG South, which compelled the OKW to issue Directive 33-A on July 23: "as soon as the state of operations and of supplies allows, the Panzer Groups 1 and 2 will be concentrated under command of 4th Panzer Army and, with the support of infantry and mounted divisions, will occupy Kharkov industrial area and thrust forward across the Don to Caucasia."

This imaginary objective was believed by the OKH to allow the forces of AG South to advance through Kharkov-Kursk, in order to provide flank protection for the operations of AG Center toward Moscow. Therefore, for the first time, a wide gap surfaced in the strategic concept between OKW and the OKH, and it was never closed. Halder believed that Moscow could be taken by the remaining of AG Center along with some help from one Army and Panzer Group 4 from AG North. Panzer Group 3 could resume the offensive after clearing its northern flank between August 5 and 10.⁴⁶

On July 28 Hitler informed Brauchitsch that he had decided to suspend the Leningrad and Ukraine operations as ordered in Directive 33-A. Two days later OKW issued Directive 34. This new Directive officially canceled Directive 33-A and postponed the movement by Panzer

Group 3 for at least another ten days. AG Center was ordered to go to the defensive along the entire front and prepare only for further operations against Gomel; the push by Panzer Group 2 into Ukraine was likewise delayed after refitting it.

On August 8 Halder issued an appraisal of the situation confronting the German Army.⁴⁸ Halder believed that the Russian attempt to push back the German front in the Smolensk area by counterattacks was on the verge of complete collapse. In his words:

This confirms my original view that North (AG) is strong enough alone to accomplish its mission, that Center (AG) must concentrate its forces to the last man to destroy the main body of the enemy's strength, whereas South (AG) is sufficiently strong to complete its mission; South may even be in a position to help out in Center.⁴⁹

On August 12 Hitler issued Directive 34-A.⁵⁰ Its language was optimistic because AG South had just concluded the Uman battle of encirclement Southwest of Kiev.⁵¹ About the others AGs Hitler stated that the primary goal in the immediate future was for AG Center to rectify the situation on both flanks. Hitler also ordered the left flank of AG Center⁵² to move northward only far enough to secure the southern flank AG North and enable this AG to shift some infantry divisions toward Leningrad. The Directive called for concluding the operations against Leningrad before an advance on Moscow was resumed.⁵³ Leningrad could be dealt with in fairly short time.⁵⁴

Halder's first impression of Directive 34-A was unfavorable, for he disliked Hitler's assertion that Leningrad must come ahead of Moscow and he described the Directive as being too restricted and not allowing OKH the freedom it needed. Two days later, however, he changed his mind⁵⁵ and said that the Directive essentially was in agreement with the OKH point of view; that is AG Center should undertake only two basic tasks. One was to resolve the situation on its flanks and prepare to push on Moscow, and the second was to make ready to send forces to aid the advance of AG South.

THE DEADLOCK IS COMPLETE.

On September 6, OKW issued Directive No. 35, instructing AG Center to prepare for an attack on Moscow. The following is an extract of that Directive:⁵⁶

2. On the *Central front*, the operation against the Timoshenko Army Group will be planned so that the attack can be begun at the earliest possible moment (end of

September) with the aim of destroying the enemy forces located in the area east of Smolensk by a pincer movement in the general direction of Vyazma, with strong *concentration* of armor on the flanks.

On 26 September, AG Center issued the order to resume the drive on Moscow.⁵⁷ It was possible to mobilize 80 divisions with a total strength of almost two million men for Operation Typhoon, but this meant that, in contrast to the situation of the Red Army, the last German reserves were exhausted. From this point on the German forces used up their resources faster than they could be replaced, with the result that the Wehrmacht's fighting power in the East rapidly declined.⁵⁸ Despite the advanced time of year, and aware of the approaching autumn mud period, on 30 September the strongly reinforced AG Center⁵⁹ launched its decisive attack against Moscow⁶⁰ and encircled the mass of eight Soviet Armies and parts of three further Armies in the Bryansk and Vyazma areas.⁶¹

In its elation at victory, when all that appeared to be left was the pursuit of the enemy remnants and the occupation of territory, the close investment of Moscow was left solely to the 4th Army and Panzer Group 4. Even though the Commander of AG Center Field Marshal Feodor Von Bock was far from happy about the redirection of the other forces, it did nothing to prevent this serious weakening of the main line of attack.⁶² The measure of confidence in victory is evident from an order by the OKH to remove a corps of four divisions from the advance on Moscow and to transport it to France for regrouping.⁶³

German intelligence contributed substantially to the overly optimistic assessment of the situation by claiming in mid-October that the enemy in front of AG Center had been decisively defeated and was no longer able to offer resistance before Moscow. Germans believed that the Red Army no longer disposed of any combat ready reserves which it could deploy before the onset of winter. ⁶⁴ That in October not only OKW, but also the OKH were confident of victory, can be seen from a statement by Halder. ⁶⁵

Bock's stance before and during the final attack remains ambivalent, fluctuating wildly between a realistic appreciation of the situation and purely wishful thinking. On the one hand he successfully resisted the OKH's attempts to set unachievable objectives far to the East of Moscow, while on the other he desperately attempted, after all, to achieve the impossible by means of the close investment of Moscow and the build-up of a defensive front against expected relief attacks to the East of the city. Although he personally witnessed the hopeless condition of his troops after the start of the attack⁶⁶ and even reported to the OKH on November 23 that it was "the eleventh hour," he yet drove forward the few formations still capable of

attack⁶⁸ in order at least to reach the northern suburbs of Moscow. And having finally come to the conclusion that his forces were no longer sufficient to invest Moscow, he still deployed as a central assault force his last remaining reserves: a single Infantry Division.⁶⁹

The risk taken by the Germans with the final attack against Moscow was, with hindsight, evidence that those responsible had mistaken the culminating point of the campaign.

LEADERSHIP CONTROVERSY.

With all due respect for Soviet resistance and defense efforts, which reached an extreme in July with the measures taken to create partisan forces, greater importance must be attached to the deceptive belief in Germany that in July the battle had already been won. From the early weeks of the campaign, this feeling of euphoria contributed to the continued underestimation of Soviet strength. Even more serious was the failure of the German leadership to take timely decisions. The opportunity was therefore missed to convert the extraordinary initial successes into factors that could have been decisive for the outcome of the war.

In its unparalleled drive to victory up to the end of July, the Wehrmacht had, in any event, achieved the preconditions for a successful continuation of the campaign. In detail this meant: in the North the capture of Leningrad and union with the Finnish; in the Center the destruction of the Armies deployed for the defense of Moscow and the capture of the capital; in the South the rapid crossing of the Dnieper below Kiev with a subsequent advance into the Eastern Ukraine and the Donetz basin. There was still enough time to attain these objectives.

Unfortunately, by this time there was dissension at the top. Differences of opinion existed between Hitler and OKH about the further conduct of operations, and this naturally delayed the ultimate decisions. It now became clear that Directive No. 21 represented a superficial compromise between two fundamentally incompatible operational ideas. On the one hand, the OKH believed that Moscow as operational objective should have absolute priority. On the other hand, Hitler was convinced that military successes on the flanks of the offensive were more important than capturing the Soviet capital.

Hitler ordered AG Center to take up a defensive position on 30 July. For him the massive resistance of the Red Army in the narrow area between the Dnieper and the Dvina and the considerable logistical problems were convincing arguments for a return to the idea, which he had favored from the very beginning, of seeking a decision on the flanks. The fact that the successes of AG North and, above all, South had been less impressive than those of AG Center probably seemed to Hitler an additional reason to transfer armored forces from the center to the

flanks. This did not mean that Moscow had been abandoned as an operational objective, but only, as envisaged in the August 12th Directive,⁷¹ that its capture had been postponed until the situation on the flanks had been taken care of. OKH leaders found it extremely alarming. They feared that the operation, which until then had developed considerable momentum, could run out of energy and that Moscow would not be reached in time, that is, before the beginning of winter. Moreover, the offensive now seemed in danger of failing to achieve its main objective: the destruction of the Red Army.

OKH's intention to continue to drive towards Moscow⁷² was side-tracked by Hitler's decision of August 20, to turn strong forces of AG Center southward so that the inner wings of AGs Center and South now sought to encircle the enemy in the battle of Kiev and cut off his retreat to the East. The tone of Hitler's reply on August 21⁷³ is clear evidence not only of the differences of opinion which existed between him and OKH but also of his intention to impose his own will more and more ruthlessly on the conduct of operations. This reply began with the words:

The proposals of OKH for the continuance of the operations in the East, dated 18 August, do not conform with my intentions. I order herewith:

1. The principal object that must be achieved yet before the onset of winter is not the capture of Moscow, but rather, in the South, the occupation of the Crimea and the industrial and coal region of the Donetz, together with isolation of the Russian oil regions in the Caucasus and, in the North, the encirclement of Leningrad and junction with the Finns.

KEY DECISIONS.

Without examining in detail all operational problems, it is appropriate to draw attention to the following negative decisions:

In the North, by stopping Panzer Group 4 in the bridgeheads on the Luga River, the OKH missed the chance of the early capture of Leningrad which was still within the realm of possibility up to the beginning of August. In early August, AG Center failed to clear its northern and southern flanks rapidly enough to disperse the strong Soviet forces, which threatened to become a serious disruptive factor for the continuation of the advance on Moscow. In the South a quick attack on Kiev in mid-July was not undertaken. Even more seriously, AG South, after its victory in the battle of Uman, lost precious time in the pursuit of a defeated enemy without gaining the important crossing over the Dnieper. The three AGs had thus let slip critically

important operational advantages, partly for lack of sufficient forces, partly from fear of the risks, but also because of operational concepts that differed from those of the OKH.

Had the OKH shown courage and vision, Germans could have taken full advantage of their opportunities, capturing Leningrad and Kiev, and establishing deep bridgeheads on the lower Dnieper by no later than mid-August. It would have been quite impossible for the Soviets to make Leningrad the center of a bitter resistance in the North, to tie down the inner flanks of AGs Center and South on the eastern edge of the Pripet Marshes, or to prepare an extensive defense on the Dnieper.

Even if Bock had clearly recognized by early August that the precondition for any further advance towards Moscow was the elimination of the enemy on the rear flanks of his AG, this task could only have been completed with the utmost effort and with no secondary diversion, particularly any actions in support of AG South.⁷⁴

With hindsight it is clear that until well into August all three AGs were primarily concerned with the pursuit of their own operational objectives and that the OKH did very little to achieve the original basic strategic objective, namely to solve the "northern problem" before launching the attack on Moscow. Obviously Halder believed that it was not necessary to set priorities, to initiate an overall coordination of the AGs in pursuit of an overriding strategic objective.

The frequently criticized Directives Nos. 33, 33-A, 34, and 34-A are not merely examples of Hitler's interference in the operational leadership but also Hitler's reactions to the unsolved both strategic and operational problems as they appeared at the end of the first phase of the campaign. Hitler's insistence on a rapid capture of Leningrad and an active cooperation of the inner flanks of AGs Center and South, cannot merely be attributed to his pursuit of military/economic objectives such as the Ukraine and the Donetz basin.

The tying down of the German forces on the inner flanks of AGs Center and South reached such a pitch that neither of the two AGs could pursue their more far reaching aims without first jointly removing this threat to their flanks. The subsequent highly successful battle of Kiev⁷⁵ was therefore the result of an operational need to lay the foundations for further offensive actions. Furthermore, the controversy between Hitler and the OKH in August 1941 not only uncovered errors in the evaluation of the enemy, but also mistakes in operational planning.

In the light of the subsequent course of the campaign, it is highly questionable whether there was any chance of success for Halder's plan to advance on Moscow in mid-August against a still unbroken enemy, knowing that the northern and southern flanks of AG Center were unprotected, and without any strategic reserves. The controversial Directives cannot,

therefore, actually be described as blunders. More to the point was the belated admission of the fact that mistaken assessments of the enemy's potential strength had remained uncorrected.

When in early September the belated siege of Leningrad began to take shape and the battle of Kiev promised to become a great operational success despite the considerable loss of time involved, those responsible could no longer beg the question of possible final victory in the East during 1941. Had the conditions for a general attack on Moscow been created? Was there still sufficient time for such campaign? Hitler's Directive of 6 September⁷⁶ on the preparation of this attack reveals that the successes to date on the northern and southern sectors of the front were considered sufficient to warrant a decisive operation against Moscow.

If the siege of Leningrad had been given up, important forces⁷⁷ would have been withdrawn in favor of reinforcing AG Center, which urgently required an armored attack force on its northern flank. Finally, and this weighed most heavily, during the critical months of October and November, AG North was unable to support the decisive attack by AG Center from the Northwest. The turn of the war on the Eastern Front was clearly evident in the northern sector as early as September 1941.

In the South, because of the late conclusion of battle of Kiev and the time-consuming regrouping and movement of troops from North and the South as reinforcements of AG Center, preparations for the key attack were only concluded at the end of September. Furthermore, as a result of the heavy German losses to date⁷⁸ AG Center, for all practical purposes had to conduct the attack on its own. On Hitler's insistence, AG South, which could have contributed decisively to the attack against Moscow, had to employ its offensive power for the conquest of the Donetz basin, Rostov and Crimea.

The autumn mud period had already set in with rain and snowfall on the night of 7 October, but the ensuing week had again brought tolerable weather conditions for military operations.⁷⁹ At about this time, however, the onset of the season of autumn mud⁸⁰ began to slow down AG Center⁸¹ which was in full pursuit, and some of whose spearheads were only about 100 km from Moscow. This distance, measured in terms of the speed of advance in early summer of 1941, would have been covered in only two to three days.

This should in no way detract from the determination of Soviet resistance. Under Zhukov's leadership a new Western Front was established. Under normal weather conditions these forces would not have been sufficient for a successful cover of a 300 km wide front on the first Moscow line of defense and to prevent the Germans from penetrating to the outskirts of the city.

CONCLUSIONS

In view of the heavy military defeats, the mass surrender of Soviets, the huge losses of territory, and the inclination of large parts of the population to regard the Germans as liberators, the future of the communist regime must have looked even more fateful in the summer of 1941 than could be read merely on the military maps. ⁸³ The serious mistakes that Stalin made during the battle of Kiev, which resulted in the loss of the Eastern Ukraine ⁸⁴ appeared to have accelerated the descent into catastrophe. ⁸⁵

So far, during the critical November days Hitler did not exert any particular influence on the final attack against Moscow. After he had admitted on 22 November that the objectives of the campaign had not been achieved, three days later and with winter fast approaching, he assigned priority to the capture of Leningrad and Southern Russia and not to the investment of Moscow. Even as late as on 13 November, during the Orsha conference, ⁸⁶ Halder, Bock, and other commanders had still reckoned on some chance of success and insisted on continuing the attack, even though the representatives of the other two AGs had argued in favor of halting the offensive.

Hitler's order of 8 December⁸⁷ to go over to the defensive along the whole front was not only a reaction to the failure to take Moscow, it was also the admission that the political and military objectives of 1941 had not been achieved. It all made an irreversible turn of the war at strategic level. This turn was the result of the German failure to capture Leningrad no later than in September, and Moscow during October, or at least to have eliminated both targets as power centers. The attack on Leningrad was broken off shortly before the expected victory as a result of military-strategy priority accorded Moscow, to which the secondary objective of Leningrad was subordinated. That the German attack bogged down after the enormous victories in the double battle of Vyazma and Bryansk was mainly due to the effect of the seasonal period of mud, and due to the errors committed in the deployment of the pursuing forces, and finally to the underestimation of the strength of Soviet resistance.⁸⁸

All things being equal, an attack date between 20 and 24 September would have offered the possibility not only of destroying the Soviet forces confronting AG Center, but also of taking Moscow before the onset of the autumn rains and the arrival of reinforcements from the Far East. Such a time advantage of about ten to twelve days could have been of decisive importance for the war, because this was roughly the time that would have been needed for a victorious completion of the offensive against Moscow the following autumn. As will appear later, when the German offensive began on October 2, there were only ten to twelve days available before the attack drowned hopelessly in the mud and rain. At this stage, Moscow lay

only two days' march ahead of the spearheads. One can only speculate as to what might have happened if the final German attack had been launched no later than September 22 rather than October 2. This brings us to the assessment that a time-span of between seven and ten days was wanting for a victorious conclusion of the campaign in the East.

The capture of Moscow by mid-October would have provided sufficient time before the onset of winter for AGs North and South to acquire additional territory as well as favorable winter positions along the whole front. It is also highly probable that the fall of Moscow would have led rapidly to the surrender of Leningrad and the consequent linkup with the Finnish Army, not to mention the psychological effects of such events on other cities and regions.

The German leadership set geographic objectives, both in planning of the campaign as well as during its course, which went far beyond what was reasonable and achievable. This indicates to what extent the purely military options were overestimated, though not that the gaining of such objectives would have been absolutely necessary for a final victory.

Today it is quite clear that despite the successes of German Army in the East, despite all the efforts made by the leadership and the troops, and despite the will to win, in 1941 Operation Barbarossa failed due to miscalculation of the time factor as well as political and military blunders by the leadership.

The essence of the failure of Germany's strategy was that it had overreached itself.

WORD COUNT = 5,993.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Joachim Schultz-Nauman, <u>The Last Thirty Days</u> (Lanham, MS, Madison Books, 1991), 102.
- ² General Walter Warlimont. Inside Hitler's Headquarters 1939-45 (Novato, CA, Presidio Press, 1964), 111-114.
- ³ Charles Burdick and Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, <u>The Halder War Diary</u>, <u>1939-1942</u> (Novato, CA, Presidio Press, 1988), 292.
 - ⁴ Ibid., 241-246.
- ⁵ It needs to be emphasized, however, that staff studies and contingency planning form parts of a military routine in Western and Central Europe, and do not traditionally require political impetus. All of the subsequent planning exercises (the Marks Plan, the Losberg Study, the Sodenstern Plan, and the plans prepared by General Paulus) were dictated by contingency.
- ⁶ The game was played in three phases, beginning on 29 November and 3 and 7 December. Ibid., 289.
 - ⁷ Warlimont, 114.
- ⁸ H. R. Trevor-Roper. <u>Blitzkrieg to Defeat, Hitler's War Directives, 1939-1945</u> (New York, NY, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 49.
 - ⁹ Ibid., 52.
 - ¹⁰ Halder, xiv and Warlimont, 4.
 - 11 50 divisions in all.
- ¹² Viktor Suvorov. I<u>cebreaker; Who Started The Second World War?</u> (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1990), 163-165.
 - ¹³ Tukhachevsky had been executed in June 1937.
- ¹⁴ Bernd Wegner. <u>From Peace to War; Germany, Soviet Russia and the World, 1939-1941</u> (Providence, RI, 1997), 361-380.
 - ¹⁵ Dating back into the 1930s.
 - ¹⁶ Barton Whaley, <u>Codeword Barbarossa</u> (Cambridge, MS, MIT Press, 1974), 24.
 - ¹⁷ Trevor-Roper, 49.
- ¹⁸ The actual Soviet completed deployment included the 1st Strategic Line with sixteen Armies, the 2nd Strategic Line with seven Armies whose deployment was not yet completed, and

the 3rd Strategic Line with three Armies, which were deployed in the greater Moscow area as a central reserve.

¹⁹ Wegner, 381-394.

²⁰ According to the plans of Zhukov , the original intent had been to deploy 258 divisions within the four Western Military Districts. The total number of divisions available or to be mobilized at the start of the war was 303. Support of ground operations was initially to be provided by 143 air regiments comprising 6,000 aircraft. From former Soviet statements it appears that at the time of the German attack the Red Army allegedly disposed of 198 infantry, 61 armored and 31 motorized divisions, a total of 290, of which about 25 per cent were still in a state of replenishment and mobilization.

²¹ Plus two brigades.

²² Along the 2nd Strategic Line.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ The numerous Soviet difficulties that arose as a result of the deployment of enormous masses of troops in the final weeks before the war began is evident from the fact that in June 77 divisions were still in transit to the Western Soviet territories. Jacob W. Kipp. Barbarossa, Soviet Covering Forces and the initial period of War; Military History and Airland Battle (Fort Leavenworth, KA,1987).

²⁵ A German infantry division numbered between 15,000 and 17,900 men, depending on list strength and manning quota. A soviet infantry division actually numbered between 10,000 and 12,000 men. Its list strength was 14,483 men, 294 guns and mortars, 16 tanks, 13 armored vehicles, 558 other vehicles and 99 tractors. Ibid.

²⁶ These calculations do not take into considerations the armies of Germany's allies because of their greatly varying equipment and combat power.

²⁷ This "mechanized corps" had a list strength of two armored divisions, one motorized divisions, 1,031 tanks, including 546 modern KW and T-34 tanks, 268 armored vehicles, 358 guns and 36,000 men. However, at the time of the German attack, the corps had only received about 50 per cent of their armor.

²⁸ 11 in all.

²⁹ Halder, 506.

³⁰ Only one week after the beginning of hostilities, the Soviet High Command was even able to set in march seven Armies from its Strategic Reserve in the 2nd Strategic Line and dispatch them to the most threatened sectors of the central front (these were 16th, 19th, 20th, 21st, 22nd, 24th and 28th Army). Wegner, 421.

³¹ Andrew L. Zapantis, <u>Hitler's Balkan Campaign and the invasion of the URSS</u> (New York, NY, Columbia University Press, 1987), 91-92.

- ³² Bryan I. Fugate and Lev Dvoretsky, <u>Thunder on the Dnieper: Zhukov-Stalin and the defeat of Hitler's Blitzkrieg</u> (Novato, CA, Presidio Press, 1997), 61.
 - ³³ Ibid., 60.
 - ³⁴ U.S. Military Academy, <u>Landscape Atlas of the USSR</u> (West Point, NY,1971), 44.
 - ³⁵ Fugate, 65.
 - ³⁶ lbid.
- ³⁷ Rudolf Hofmann, <u>Decisive Battles of World War II: The German View</u> (New York, NY, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1965) 138.
 - ³⁸ Halder, 416-418.
 - ³⁹ Ibid., 413.
 - ⁴⁰ Ibid., 414.
 - ⁴¹ Ibid., 432.
- ⁴² Werner Haupt, A<u>rmy Group Center, the Wehrmacht in Russia, 1941-1945</u> (Atglen, PA, Schiffer Military History, 1997), 326.
- ⁴³ Eight days later, this shrunk to eight trains. The effect of this was so catastrophic that the divisions on the Dnieper were soon short of ammunition. Ibid., 61.
 - ⁴⁴ Wegner, 209.
 - ⁴⁵ Trevor-Roper, 89.
- ⁴⁶ Klaus Gerbet. <u>Generalfeldmarschall Fedor Von Bock, The War Diary, 1939-1945</u> (Atglen, PA, 1996), 258.
- ⁴⁷ The uncertainty that existed in future German strategy is clearly revealed in this Directive. Trevor-Roper, 91.
- ⁴⁸ Halder's appraisal listed the relationship of forces in divisions as follows: Army Group Center 70 Russian (including 8 ½ of armor) versus 60 German (including 17 of armor). Three days later had to admit that instead of the 200 divisions that he believed the Russians had originally deployed, 360 divisions had been identified on the entire Eastern Front. Halder, 503-506.
 - ⁴⁹ Ibid., 504.
 - ⁵⁰ Trevor-Roper, 93.
 - ⁵¹ Encircling some 103,000 prisoners.

- ⁵² Panzer Group 3 and 9th Army
- ⁵³ Ibid., 94.
- ⁵⁴ Fugate, 327.
- ⁵⁵ Halder, 508.
- ⁵⁶ Trevor-Roper, 97.
- ⁵⁷ The German Army in the East was already 200,000 men under strength and it was doubtful if these missing men could ever be replaced.
- ⁵⁸ Bernd Wegner. <u>The Road to Defeat: The German Campaigns in Russia 1941-43</u> (Portland, OR, Frank Cass, 1990), 113.
- ⁵⁹ Three Armies and three Panzer Groups, supported by two Air Corps and two Antiaircraft Corps.
- ⁶⁰ A later order (19th September 1941) gave to this intended attack the cover name "*Taifun* (Typhoon)". Trevor-Roper, 96.
- ⁶¹ On 19 October the AG Center's Commander proudly announced the capture of 673,000 men, and the destruction or capture of more than 1,200 tanks and over 5,400 guns. With this the Red Army had suffered a devastating defeat which even surpassed the collapse of the Southwest Front in the Eastern Ukraine in September. Von Bock, 336.
 - 62 Ibid., 332.
 - ⁶³ Halder, 553.
- ⁶⁴ The introduction of reinforcements from Russia Asia, which completely escaped the attention of German air reconnaissance, provided the defenders of Moscow with at least thirteen Infantry divisions and five armored brigades by the end of October. Some of these formations were already involved in heavy fighting on the western approaches to Moscow between Borodino and Moshaisk as early as 13 October.
 - ⁶⁵ Ibid., 553-554.
- ⁶⁶ Many Battalions were being led by lieutenants, and Regiments were down to 250 fighting men. Von Bock, 365.
 - ⁶⁷ Ibid., 368.
- ⁶⁸ Between 2 October and 15 November 1941 the losses by Army Group Center increased by 87,400 men and reached a total of 316,569 men since the start of the campaign.
 - ⁶⁹ Ibid., 366.

- ⁷⁰ Directive No. 34. Trevor-Roper, 91.
- ⁷¹ Directive 34-A.
- ⁷² OKH Memorandum dated August 18, 1941. Ibid., 95.
- ⁷³ Halder, 514.
- ⁷⁴ Von Bock, 273.
- ⁷⁵ Lasting until 26 September 1941.
- ⁷⁶ Directive No. 35.
- ⁷⁷ 8th and 12th Panzer Divisions, 18th and 20th Infantry Divisions (motorized), and the Totenkopf SS Division.
- 78 The armored forces involved were only up to 45 to 50 per cent of their original combat power.
 - ⁷⁹ Ibid., 329.
 - ⁸⁰ The subject of much discussion.
- ⁸¹ Even Von Bock states that the first snow and hail fell within the sector of his Army Group on 10 October. Von Bock, 329.
- ⁸² After the deployment of reserves in mid-October, the defense of Moscow was entrusted to twelve infantry divisions and sixteen brigades. Zhukov states that in mid-October the strength of his western Front was about 90,000 men.
 - ⁸³ Wegner, 431-448.
- ⁸⁴ According to German claims, the Red Army lost five Armies with 665,000 captured, not counting the dead and wounded (450,000 according to other sources).
- ⁸⁵ In the course of the battle of Kiev which ended on 26 September, the Soviet 5th, 21st, 26th, 37th, and 38th Armies were encircled and almost completely destroyed, while the 6th and 40th Armies suffered heavy losses. The military catastrophe in the South was so grave that a completely new Southwest Front had to be created.
- ⁸⁶ Earl F. Ziemke, "Frank Halder at Orsha: The German General Staff seeks a consensus." Military Affairs, Vol 39, No 4 (1975), 173-176.
 - ⁸⁷ Directive No. 39. Trevor-Roper, 107.
- ⁸⁸ The subsequent criticism by senior officers involved was primarily directed against the fact that an armored corps belonging to Panzer Group 3 which had freedom of movement after the Vyazma pocket had been closed, was not immediately sent East towards Moscow but rather

Northeast to Kalinin. Furthermore that important armored forces of Panzer Group 4 were held back on the southern front of Vyazma for a relatively long time to guard against breakout attempts, instead of being sent in pursuit towards Moscow as quickly as possible.

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